

April 15,2025

My name is Priscila Bitencourt. I am the McKinney Vento Liaison for the district of Portland. In my role, I support families experiencing homelessness and staff to become more culturally responsive when working with our multilingual population. I have taken the exam 8 times and failed every time because of a lack of equitable language access and systemic racism.

I entered the school of social work in 2016. I was committed to becoming a bilingual social worker in a state with a growing multilingual population. Throughout the five years of my BSW and MSW programs, I had many opportunities to increase my knowledge, including an internship with Spurwink and Portland Public Schools. I graduated from USM with a 4.0 GPA and excellent references. Still, this was not enough for me to pass the ASWB Masters exam.

The first time I tried, I failed by 10 points. The second time I tried, I failed by six questions. At this time, I could identify that the language was the barrier. I have been able to use the accommodation of an English dictionary, but many times, the words on the exams are not in the dictionary.

After the second time, I burned out. I had spent my entire summer studying and traveling 100 miles to take the exam out of state because the site in Maine was never available. I spent more than I could afford on materials, classes, tutoring, and exam registration. Lastly, coming home and facing the sadness on my kids' faces when they realized how discouraged I was, as we saw the equity issue before our eyes.

On Jan 16, 2024 I was scheduled to take the exam again. When I got there, they told me they had canceled my exam because the site did not have a dictionary. On February 14th, I retook the exam without a dictionary. I failed again by 5 points. At this time, I was in the mode of "I DON'T CARE"! It didn't affect me; at least that is how I felt. Since last year, I have been in the stabilization and safety phase of trauma. I withdrew from others and didn't want to participate in social work events. I started to hear from others and repeat to myself that "I WAS NOT A SOCIAL WORKER," as painful as this was to me, this was a way I found to protect myself from the trauma that this exam had caused me.

Not thinking that this has been enough of the awful experience with licensure, on March 01, 2024, I received an email from the Office of Professional and Occupational Regulation supervisor, saying that I had passed the ASWB exam that I took on February 14th. I checked the state website and found a temporary license number with directions to apply for licensing after passing the exam. I cried and celebrated with my family and co-workers. I started to plan my journey in school; however, deep down, I knew something was wrong.

On March 26, 2024, I received another email from Michael Tarr saying that they had made a mistake and that I had not passed the exam!

Recently, my professional journey collapsed. I was told that I could no longer be called a social worker. To protect my role, I had to obtain a teacher certification. My name is Priscila Bitencourt; I am a proud Latina and a person of color who can identify that the ASWB exam is a form of institutional racism.